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Revolutionary as Christ: The Unrecognized Savior in Lu Xun's Works

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It would seem arrogant and absurd to claim that Lu Xun, the great Chinese writer, has not been truly understood and appreciated by his critics and admirers, given the fact that research and scholarship on Lu Xun is a veritable "industry" in the People's Republic of China, where his complete works have been edited, annotated, and printed many times over; where his residences in several cities are preserved and turned into museums; where dozens of memoirs, biographies, monographs, and articles have been published, many of which appear in scholarly journals exclusively devoted to Lu Xun studies. And yet it is undeniable that for decades the study of Lu Xun was heavily politicized and put under a tight control by the ideological establishment on the Chinese mainland, while in Taiwan, where the political pendulum swung to the other extreme, the Nationalist government kept Lu Xun under a strict ban. In a situation like this, understanding and appreciation were inevitably and severely curtailed. As a relentlessly anti-traditionalist thinker and radical iconoclast, a pungent satirist, a superb essayist, a great writer, and a leftist intellectual, Lu Xun is without question the most famous author in the history of modern China. On the mainland, however, he was not just read and respected as a great writer: he was deified. Although never a member of the Communist Party, he was canonized as a patron saint of the Chinese communist revolution. Mao Zedong himself gave the official sanction to the apotheosis. "The chief commander of China's cultural revolution, he was not only a great man of letters, but a great thinker and revolutionary," Mao says of Lu Xun. "On the cultural front, he was the bravest and most correct, the firmest, the most loyal, and the most ardent national hero, a hero without parallel in our history" (2:372). For many years that was the starting point and final conclusion of Lu Xun studies in China, the absolute orientation and frame that encompassed all commentaries on his works and their interpretations. Such a heavy political imposition, however,

cannot but make one wonder whether Lu Xun's very fame has obscured Lu Xun the man, his ideas, and his writings, and whether it is at all possible for a Lu Xun scholar to avoid, until fairly recently, having his scholarly work turned into something of a footnote to the orthodoxy of official evaluation.

Once deified as a great revolutionary and a national hero, Lu Xun and his works were interpreted in terms of Mao's authoritative view and brought in line with communist ideology. The overall result, as Leo Ou-fan Lee succinctly puts it, "is a narrowing of vision that has reduced the immense complexities of his personality and thought to a simplistic set of heroic traits" (*Legacy* x). One of the consequences of this narrowing of vision is the inevitable self-inflicted blindness to those aspects of Lu Xun's thought that are incompatible with the ideological prerequisites for a heroic figure of the communist revolution. One such aspect, which has hardly been mentioned in the numerous books and articles on Lu Xun, is his humanistic understanding of the Passion of Christ, the use of a Christ figure to express his highly ambivalent notion of revolution and his profoundly tragic view of the relationship between the sacrificing revolutionaries and the numb and benighted masses, for whom the revolutionary martyrs nobly and quixotically give up their lives. Of course, the neglect of this particular aspect of Lu Xun's thought is not surprising because religion, as seen from a Marxist point of view, is the proverbial "opium of the people," and Christianity in particular is the Western imperialists' tool of cultural invasion. When the Maoist official evaluation held sway over Lu Xun studies in China, it would have been politically suicidal for a Chinese critic to suggest that the figure of Christ could have any positive meaning in the works of Lu Xun, the great fighter for communist revolution. As a result, this aspect of Lu Xun's thought—the use of a Christ figure in his works with implications of sacrifice, solitude, and saving grace—becomes a deeply repressed dimension that is rarely, if ever, brought to light in critical discussion. Thus, in the voluminous works of interpretation and literary criticism, the Savior in Lu Xun's works remains unacknowledged and unrecognized.

Lu Xun himself made a number of direct references to Jesus Christ in his writings. In one of his earliest publications, "Wenhua pianzhi lun" ("On Cultural Extremities" [1908]), he gave a brief survey of European culture and history and mentioned that the birth of Jesus was used to mark the beginning of the world's commonly accepted chronology (1:47). The significance of this simple observation needs to be understood in its historical context because China at that moment still had an emperor, and dynastic sequence and the title of an emperor's reign were used as markers of time. The last emperor was overthrown

in 1911, which ushered in the modern period of Chinese history and its many debates and confrontations. A heated debate raged between cultural conservatives, who held to the classical Chinese as the essential means for the preservation of culture and tradition, and the advocates of a "literary revolution," who promoted the use of modern vernacular as a worthy medium for literary expression. In 1919 a traditionalist scholar attacked the new literature written in the vernacular as following the style of the Gospel of Matthew, which, like the other books of the Bible, was translated into plain Chinese for the obvious purpose of making Christian ideas readily accessible. In polemically relating the new vernacular literature with something foreign and taking it to be a poor imitation of alien ideas and alien style, the xenophobic traditionalist critic tried to put down new literature as un-Chinese and culturally inferior. In his retort, however, Lu Xun declared straightforwardly that "the Gospel according to Matthew is a good book and well worth reading" and that how Jesus was crucified "merits even more of our careful examination" ("Cun tie" ["Inch of Iron"] 8:89).[1] But how did Lu Xun examine the crucifixion of Jesus? What meaning did he derive from it? A short essay he wrote in 1927 seems to give us some indication. In that essay Lu Xun told his readers, tongue in cheek, that he had not written as many essays lately to "scold" his enemies as he would like because they were turning his "scolding" to their own advantage and blaming him for all their mistakes and failures. He would not want to "scold" them in such a way as to give his enemies any more excuse for their folly and incompetence. "I do not intend to imitate Jesus," says Lu Xun; "why should I bear the cross for others?" ("'Yibiao zhi wai'" ["'Outside One's Expectations'"] 3:496). On the surface this seems yet another cursory reference, but in fact it provides an important clue to the way Lu Xun understood the meaning of Jesus and his crucifixion. What stands out here is the idea of sacrifice, the altruistic act of "bear[ing] the cross for others." As we shall see, this is precisely the idea that Lu Xun develops in his moving portrayal of the sacrifice of revolutionaries for the benefit of the people, a sacrifice of which the meaning is highly ambiguous and profoundly tragic in his literary works.

Lu Xun lived through the Revolution of 1911 that toppled China's last imperial dynasty. When he was a student in Japan at the turn of the century, he joined *Guangfu hui* or the Society for Reclaiming China, a revolutionary organization aimed at the overthrow of the Manchu rule, where he became acquainted with a number of young and idealistic students who were later to die for the cause of that revolution. From the very start, however, Lu Xun's commitment to revolution was more spiritual than political in the sense that he aimed to change not just the political system of Chinese society but first and foremost the

minds of the Chinese themselves. He went to Japan as a medical student but soon turned to literature because, as he told us, a strong body without a healthy spirit was worthless, and he was convinced that insofar as the Chinese were concerned "our first important task is to change their spirit" ("*Na han* zixu" ["Preface to *Call to Arms*"] 1:417). For Lu Xun, as for many intellectuals of the May Fourth new cultural movement, to change the spirit meant to lead the Chinese to the spirit of modernity, of which the most important values are science and democracy, the awakening of the individual sense of human dignity. It was literature, he thought at the time, that could bring about the most effective change and transformation of a nation's spirit. It turns out, however, that to change a soul is much more difficult to accomplish than to cure a sick body. If the Revolution of 1911 did little in changing the social and political structure, it did nothing to change the spirit of the Chinese populace. After the old imperial regime collapsed, the only apparent change Lu Xun noticed in his hometown, Shaoxing, was a set of new flags, but he knew that, "though the appearance was such, the bones inside remained the same" ("Fan Ainong" 2:313). The end of the emperor's rule was followed only by the rule of despotic warlords who fought each other for greater control of land and wealth; those who were rich and powerful under the old regime quickly adapted themselves to the new order of the day and retained their social status, while the poor and the powerless stayed where they were, if not actually being pushed further down on the social ladder.

"I feel that before the revolution I was a slave," says Lu Xun; "and soon after the revolution, I was cheated by the slaves and became a slave to them." Insofar as the social structure was concerned, there was hardly any fundamental change; the ideals of the young revolutionaries were completely shattered. "I feel that the blood of many martyrs has been rubbed out by people's feet," Lu Xun continues, "and yet they didn't do it intentionally" ("Huran xiangdao" ["Sudden Thoughts"] 3:16). It was this unintended, nearly unconscious erasure of the blood of the revolutionaries that made him feel extremely sad and totally disenchanted with any idealistic and optimistic vision of revolution and change. He felt that there was an abysmal gap between the awakened few and the multitude who were still numb and senseless in their long spiritual torpor, and he seriously doubted whether it was possible to change the spirit of a people who were ignorant of their own humanity, apathetic and completely indifferent to new ideas and new changes. It was such profound disillusionment and skepticism that provided the psychological basis for the famous "iron house" metaphor that articulated Lu Xun's rather pessimistic view of China and its prospects for change. At a time when he secluded himself and wrestled

with intense emotional and spiritual loneliness, burying himself in the dreary and meaningless work of copying ancient tablet inscriptions, a friend came and asked him to write something for the radical new journal *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*). Lu Xun responded by evoking the nightmarish image of an iron house that has since become one of the most well known and frightening images of China:

> Suppose there is an iron house that has no windows and is absolutely indestructible, in which lie many people who are soundly asleep and who are about to die of suffocation, but they feel no sorrow of the impending death as they are falling from drowsy slumber into total demise. Now you cry out loudly and startle up the several relatively sober ones among them only to make these unfortunate few to suffer the irremediable pain of death. Do you think you are doing them a favor? ("*Na han* zixu" ["Preface to *Call to Arms*"] 1:419)

Lu Xun did cry out, however, and the collection of his short stories was significantly titled *Na han* or *Call to Arms*. He reasoned that his own despair could not prove the futility of other people's hope, that even he himself could not forget the pain of his loneliness, and that by crying out he wanted not only to release himself from that pain but also to "give consolation to the warrior who is charging forth in solitude so that he will not be afraid to push on" (1:419). Still, the "iron house" provides a metaphorical framework for many of his stories, in which the protagonist is often a lonely man struggling in a repressive surrounding. In trying to awaken the multitude to break the iron house, and especially in sacrificing the self for the benefit of the multitude who do not understand the sacrifice or the sacrificer, the lonely revolutionary, as Lu Xun described him, bears some resemblance to the figure of Christ. In one of his best stories, "Medicine," Lu Xun gave a powerful expression to many of the ideas and themes we have touched upon: his complicated and highly ambivalent feelings about revolution, his disillusionment and solitude, his respect for the noble spirit of the revolutionary martyr, his pity for the masses and sober-minded recognition of their spiritual inertia, his tragic sense of the relationship between the sacrifice of the revolutionary and the ignorance of the average people. "Medicine" is a highly symbolic story, and it is in the figure of an executed revolutionary that we catch a glimpse of the image of Christ who "bears the cross for others."

The symbolism of the story is skillfully constructed by making variations on a real event. On 15 July 1907, a few years before the Qing dynasty was overthrown, a young woman by the name of Qiu Jin, who had joined the secret revolutionary organization, was executed for her involvement in an assassination attempt. Like Lu Xun, she was a native

of Shaoxing, and she died heroically in that city at a place called "Ancient Pavilion Towngate." In Lu Xun's story the place of execution bears a similar name, "Ancient Pavilion Gate," and the name of the young revolutionary is Xia Yu. Now the name Qiu Jin literally means "fine autumn jade," while Xia Yu, the fictional character in Lu Xun's story, means "fine summer jade." Even though the revolutionary in the story is a young man, not a woman, his name unmistakably recalls that of the famous heroine of the anti-Qing revolution. By changing the surname of the revolutionary from Qiu (autumn) to Xia (summer), however, Lu Xun was able to make another significant connection in the story between the revolutionary (Xia Yu) and the average people, represented by the family of Hua. Now Hua and Xia joined together as a combination designate the very name of China, and thus these names immediately assume a broad symbolic meaning that clearly indicates that Lu Xun's story is not just a fictionalized account of the death of a particular historical figure but a much larger story, an allegory about revolution, about the tragic situation and the historical fate of China. It is, in this sense, an eminent example of what Fredric Jameson calls the "national allegory" in Lu Xun's works (69). The sentiment expressed in the story, however, has nothing to do with Chinese nationalism; on the contrary, it is an expression of the extreme loneliness and pain the few awakened individuals feel in a suffocating iron house.

Symbolically, therefore, the Hua family's tea house *is* China, and the several characters who frequent the tea house are representatives of the average Chinese. But it is China in a precarious condition, for the Huas—Old Shuan and his wife—are poor and plain folks, and their son, Little Shuan, is dying of tuberculosis. The future of the Hua family, embodied in the consumption of their young son, looks very much in danger. Ignorant and illiterate, Old Shuan and his wife superstitiously believe that their son can be cured if only they can procure him a piece of steamed bread dipped in fresh human blood—hence the title, "Medicine." In four sections the story tells how Old Shuan buys blood-stained bread from the executioner (I), how Little Shuan eats the bread (II), how the customers in the tea house gossip about the executed son of the Xia family (III), and how the two mothers of the Hua and the Xia families meet in the bleak burial-ground (IV). Since Hua-Xia means China, nothing can be more tragic than the story in which Xia Yu, the son of China, dies for the Huas and the other folks, namely the average Chinese, but the folks have no understanding whatsoever of his cause or his sacrifice, and the only thing the Huas did is to pay the executioner for a piece of bread dipped in his blood. The revolutionary, in other words, is a solitary and tragic figure never comprehended by the very people for whom he has dedicated his life. The eating of bread

dipped in the young man's blood is, of course, highly symbolic. It continues to develop the theme of the cannibalistic self-destruction of China, which Lu Xun had already explored in the first story he published, "Diary of a Madman," a theme that gives a special pathos to the powerful final scene in which we find the younger generation dead, both Xia Yu and Little Shuan in their graves, mourned by their old mothers. At the same time, the eating of bread smeared with the revolutionary's blood also emphasizes the almost ritualistic sense of sacrifice, a gruesome variation of a ritual that strongly evokes a symbolic meaning very similar to that of the Eucharist. The blood of the revolutionary in Lu Xun's story, however, does not have any expiatory effect, which again gives prominence to the tragic but human sense of a terrible waste, the sacrifice of young, idealistic revolutionaries whose deaths fail to awaken the ignorant masses. In reading this story, one cannot but feel that the significance of revolution is very much put in question; and the question is whether it was worthwhile to die for people who did nothing except watch the execution of a revolutionary and dip a piece of bread in his blood.

Xia Yu's story is told indirectly through idle talk in the tea house, but an image of a noble spirit comes through strongly in spite of the incomprehension and hostility of those who gossip about him. He is obviously an enlightened but lonely figure surrounded by those who are spiritually dead. Uncle Kang, a ferocious-looking fellow associated with jailers and executioners, tells everyone in the tea house that the young prisoner tried to disseminate revolutionary ideas even to the prison guard, the Red-Eyed Ah Yi, but the guard slapped him on the face. Then the gossip goes on:

> "Ah Yi is a good boxer," said the Hunchback at the corner gleefully, "those slaps must have served him right."
>
> "But that miserable wretch was not scared of beating, and even said that he felt pity."
>
> "What was it to have pity for in beating such a wretch?" said the Graybeard.
>
> With a air of utter contempt, Uncle Kang replied disdainfully, "You didn't hear me right. The way he said it, it looks that he was having pity on Ah Yi!" ("Yao" ["Medicine"] 1:446)

Clearly the young revolutionary is on a different level than everyone else in the story. Not only does he have no fear, but he also has no anger toward his persecutors. From the height of his noble spirit, he is able to see what the others cannot even begin to dream about, and he has pity for them. The magnanimity of spirit and the capability to feel pity for his enemies who strike his face cannot but remind us of the

figure of Christ on the cross. Leo Lee is quite right when he says:

> Compassion at the height of physical torture is clearly inspired by the example of Jesus Christ—a motif Lu Xun later developed more fully in his prose poem "Revenge II." Like Jesus, the revolutionary pities his ignorant compatriots for their cruelty and lack of understanding. He dies, it seems, with full realization of the irony that his martyrdom is futile: the passive countrymen for whom he sacrifices his life can never grasp its true meaning. However, unlike Jesus, the revolutionary has no recourse to the higher authority in God: the ultimate question of meaning cannot be derived from any transcendent source. This is the final tragedy of Lu Xun's humanism. (*Voices* 66-67)

Indeed, Lu Xun's revolutionary as Christ is very much a sober but lonely figure among sleepers dying in an iron house. His message falls on deaf ears, and the meaning of his sacrifice is totally lost upon the multitude. In the fictional world of Lu Xun's works, then, the Savior remains unacknowledged and unrecognized. The humanized Christ performs no miracles and does not promise any heavenly reward in an afterlife, as all these concepts are quite alien to Lu Xun's mind, and it is the human aspect, Christ as the Son of Man offered as sacrifice on the cross, that appeals to him as profoundly revealing of the tragic human condition.

In a way the Christ figure in Lu Xun is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as portrayed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book with which Lu Xun was familiar and which, in the words of Walter Kaufmann, is "the work of an utterly lonely man" (103). This may sound strange, given Nietzsche's vehemently anti-Christian polemic, but that polemic has little relevance in China, and Lu Xun's understanding of Nietzsche, no less than his understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus, is mediated by his own sense of what is needed for the spiritual regeneration of the Chinese. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was the only work that had some influence in China at the time, and Lu Xun probably did not know, and certainly did not make any in-depth study of, *The Antichrist*, *Ecce Homo*, and Nietzsche's other works. As Benjamin Schwartz observes, Lu Xun was "not really committed to the whole system of Nietzscheanism as a *Weltanschauung*, nor did he share all of the preoccupations and exasperations of Nietzsche. What seems to have attracted him, above all, was a certain emotion-charged image of the sensitive, spiritual hero confronting a stupid and vicious world—confronting 'the mob'" (17). That spiritual hero, in Lu Xun's understanding, was the *Übermensch* that Zarathustra called for, and such a hero was transformed into the lonely revolutionary in "Medicine."

Lu Xun translated the Prologue of *Zarathustra* and quoted from that

work several times in his essays. We may even find a possible source or inspiration for his "iron house" metaphor in the following words from that Prologue: "Zarathustra is an awakened one; what do you now want among the sleepers?" (123). Probably Lu Xun would not side with Nietzsche in his overly dramatic denunciation of pity as the small man's virtue, but he could very well agree with Nietzsche that truly great love would transcend mere pity and goad the pitiable into fury and action. Indeed, the following words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra may serve as an appropriate comment on Lu Xun's story and provide a clue to the nature of pity that the revolutionary feels toward the prison guard and the other folks in "Medicine." Zarathustra says:

> But if you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a hard bed as it were, a field cot: thus will you profit him best.
>
> And if a friend does you evil, then say: "I forgive you what you did to me; but that you have done it to *yourself*—how could I forgive that?" Thus speaks all great love: it overcomes even forgiveness and pity. (202)

If Xia Yu forgives and pities the prison guard and others, Lu Xun as the author shows a more properly Nietzschean sense of "great love" articulated in the above passage that "overcomes even forgiveness and pity." His depiction of the ignorant folks in the tea house is marked with contempt and even anger, which put him at a distance from the pitying and idealistic revolutionary. Lu Xun did not intend, as he told us, to imitate Jesus, and thus he would distance himself from the sacrificing Christ, but, on the other hand, he would not follow the more dramatic excesses of Zarathustra either. In fusing the Nietzschean *Übermensch* with the crucified Christ, Lu Xun humanized both while bringing into prominence the loneliness of the awakened few among the ignorant and lethargic sleepers. His contempt and anger at the ignorant multitude ultimately originated from his intense love of them, a great love that would see them precisely not as the multitude but as individual human beings, each one of them in his or her own right.

In "Medicine" the reference to the sacrifice of Christ is indirect and oblique, and the very effort to find connections between Lu Xun's works and the image of Christ may appear strained if we have no other text in which such a connection is made explicit. "Revenge II," a prose poem Lu Xun wrote in December 1924, is just such a text. It is the sequel to "Revenge," a closely related text written at roughly the same time. In "Revenge" Lu Xun describes a couple standing face to face in a vast open field, stark naked, each holding a sharp knife in the hand, as though they are about to embrace or to fight each other. Then a crowd of passers-by gather around them, like swarms of larvae or ants "coming from all four directions and stretching their necks to enjoy the scene

of embracing or killing. They already savor in anticipation the taste of sweat or blood fresh on the tip of their tongues once the whole affair is over" ("Fuchou" ["Revenge"] 2:172). The mob that gather together to watch a scene of embracing or killing, with their necks stretched, clearly recall a similar description of the passive spectators in "Medicine," where the mob gather in a semicircle to watch the execution of the young revolutionary. Through Old Shuan's eyes the reader sees the mob from the behind: "Their necks were all stretched long, as if they were so many ducks gripped by an invisible hand and lifted upwards" ("Yao" ["Medicine"] 1:441). The mob's anticipation of tasting sweat or blood on their tongues also reminds us of the cannibalistic theme in "Medicine," the eating of a piece of steamed bread dipped in the blood of the revolutionary martyr. In "Revenge," however, the mob is denied their sadistic pleasure of voyeurism and cannibalism, for the couple stand still in the wilderness, with not a single gesture or movement, not even a suggestion of embracing or killing, until their bodies become seared and dry, as if frozen in eternity. That denial of the mob's pleasure, the boredom that forces the idle spectators back into their idleness and insignificance, is what Lu Xun meant by "Revenge." The confrontation here is not between the two people standing in the wilderness but between the couple as individualized giants and the faceless, undistinguished mob. The notion of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* has an unmistakable presence here, and the Zarathustran contempt for the ignorant and malicious mob definitely underlies the conception and imagery of Lu Xun's text.

"Revenge II" takes us from the Nietzschean imperative of overcoming forgiveness and pity to the curse on sinners and persecutors in the crucifixion of Jesus. In this prose poem Lu Xun directly goes to the biblical source and closely follows the text of Mark in the portrayal of the final moments of Jesus. Many lines in this work are almost direct quotations from the Chinese version of the Bible. Where Lu Xun writes out of his own imagination, he infuses moments of bold, creative empathy into a realistic depiction, laying emphasis again on the contrast of the vicarious sufferings of Jesus and the ignorant and malicious mob. This is the scene at Golgotha as Lu Xun imagines it:

> All around him was hostility: those that were to be pitied and those to be cursed.
>
> With a loud din, the sharp end of a nail penetrated his palm: they were about to crucify the Son of God, those poor creatures! That made him feel calm in the pain. With a loud din, the sharp end of a nail penetrated the instep and shattered a bone, sending intense pain to his heart and marrow. And yet, they were crucifying their Son of God, those accursed creatures, and that made him feel comfortable in the pain. ("Fuchou qi er" ["Revenge II"] 2:174)

In Lu Xun's depiction Jesus as the Son of God knew that those who crucified him were doomed to eternal perdition, and that foreknowledge made him feel calm and pleased in the pain. The final moment of death was thus not a moment of sorrow but one of joy: "Suddenly, the great pain of shattered bones pierced his heart and marrow, and he sank into the intoxicating great joy and great compassion." This is, however, not so much a celebration of the triumph of divine justice as the savoring of the anticipated perdition of the accursed, the punishment of those sinners and persecutors for their cruelty and ignorance. For Lu Xun the real tragedy is not so much the crucifixion of the Son of God as the death of the Son of Man, the killing of the lonely Christ by the mob who neither understand nor accept his love. This humanistic understanding of the Passion of Christ is again combined with Lu Xun's assimilation of the Nietzschean contempt of the ignorant multitude, and it is essential for us to grasp such a combination in order to read the ending of "Revenge II":

> There was darkness over the whole land.
> "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which is, being interpreted, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
> God had forsaken him, and he remained a Son of Man in the end; but the Israelites crucified even the Son of Man.
> Those who crucified the Son of Man were stained and reeking with blood even more so than those who crucified the Son of God. (2:175)

Thus in Lu Xun's poem Jesus died on the cross as the Son of Man killed by men who did not understand him or recognize him as the Savior. Compared with "Revenge," as Leo Lee argues, the ending of "Revenge II" seems "more 'humanistic'" because it does not emphasize the divinity of Christ but presents "an affirmation of his human status" (*Voices* 105). In view of the anticipated horrible punishment of those sinners and persecutors, however, the ending is also filled with dark anger and menace, a curse upon those who crucified the Son of Man. It is this sentiment of anger and contempt for the mob that explains why the text is titled "Revenge II." Such anger and contempt also connect this text with "Medicine" because in both texts we are allowed to catch a glimpse of the dark and deep-seated ire and disillusionment that Lu Xun felt after the Revolution of 1911, a revolution that betrayed the idealistic yearnings the young Lu Xun had harbored for a fundamental spiritual change in the Chinese.

"Revenge" and "Revenge II" are included in *Yecao* (*Wild Grass*), Lu Xun's collection of prose poems. Unlike his essays which were first published in newspapers and magazines as timely, witty, and often sarcastic comments on current events and issues, and which clearly

belong to the domain of public discourse as a form of militant journalism, *Wild Grass* stands out as a somewhat unique work in the Lu Xun canon because it offers a literary space for articulating his more personal, often dark and sorrowful, ruminations and meditations. Precisely for that reason, however, *Wild Grass* was for a very long time neglected by critics in China, and even in some of the more perceptive studies in recent years there is still a tendency to situate this work in an historical narrative that presents Lu Xun's career as a teleological process that led from depression in his years as a lonely "revolutionary democrat" toward the grand finale of hope and optimism when he allegedly found endless spiritual resources in communism and devoted himself completely to the cause of communist revolution. In such a narrative frame the repressed dimension of Lu Xun's thought is still repressed, and the figure of Christ in his works is still quickly glossed over as insignificant or, at best, a trace of his ideological limitations. In one of the best books that have come out since the 1980s, Sun Yushi's study of *Wild Grass*, we still find, for example, after some fairly informative and intelligent comments on the two "Revenge" poems, an almost perfunctory quibble over what the author calls the "weaknesses in Lu Xun's thought." When he wrote these prose poems, we are told, Lu Xun was "confined to individualistic ideas and unable to observe, from the perspective of historical materialism, the relationship between the revolutionary pioneers and the revolutionary masses, and he had not found the mighty torrent of awakened and risen revolutionary forces." Lu Xun's representation of that relationship was therefore marred by "his excessive sentiment of solitude" and his "biased views" that were to be overcome at a later stage of his development (105).

The question, however, is whether such a teleological narrative of Lu Xun's development necessarily imposes a strongly tendentious reading that excludes the possibility of understanding Lu Xun's works as anything other than trail marks on that very process of teleology. Despite his close relations with some leading communists in his later years, Lu Xun never joined the party himself and thus remained alone all his life politically and spiritually, even though he was important in the League of Left-Wing Writers and committed to the idea of political and spiritual revolution. That fiercely individualistic and independent spirit so characteristic of Lu Xun is an embarrassing hindrance to the construction of Lu Xun as a saint of communist revolution, but it also provides a clue to the complexity of his thought and the richness of his art. By paying attention to these traits of Lu Xun, and by rereading his works and carefully considering the neglected aspects of those works, we may begin to truly understand him and his significance for modern China. The consideration of the symbolic meaning of a Christ figure in

Lu Xun's works, which has so far rarely been attempted in Lu Xun scholarship, may perhaps serve as an example of such a rereading, a new way to begin the exploration of those neglected aspects of Lu Xun in our attempt at a fuller understanding of this great Chinese writer.

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NOTES

[1]All translations from Lu Xun's works in this essay are my own.

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